

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4549
INFO AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SANTO DOMINGO 2612

PARIS FOR ARA DEPUTY ASSIST SECY BUSHNELL

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, DR
SUBJECT: THE OVERVIEW ON ELECTION EVE

SUMMARY: IT SEEMS TO BE ENDING WITHOUT A BANG. END SUMMARY.

1. THE HARDEST FOUGHT POLITICAL CAMPAIGN IN MODERN DOMINICAN HISTORY OFFICIALLY ENDED LAST NIGHT AND NOW THE COUNTRY, IN A SURPRISINGLY CALM MOOD, AWAITS THE RESULTS OF TOMORROW'S VOTING. THESE MAY NOT BE KNOWN UNTIL LATE IN THE WEEK, IF THAT EARLY. UNOFFICIAL RETURNS, HOWEVER, BASED ON VOTE COUNTS BY POLL-WATCHERS OF THE CONTESTING PARTIES, SHOULD INDICATE A TREND BY SOMETIME WEDNESDAY.

2. AS THE CAMPAIGN WOUND DOWN, TWO POLITICAL FORCES HAD POLARIZED AND A SINGLE ISSUE WAS CLEARLY DRAWN. THE AFFAIR IS NOW UNQUESTIONABLY A STRUGGLE BETWEEN PRESIDENT BALAGUER AND HIS GOVERNMENT/PARTIDO REFORMISTA ALLIANCE FAVORED BY THE ARMED FORCES, AND THE MIDDLE/LOWER CLASS PARTIDO REVOLUCIONARIO DOMINICANO (PRD); THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT THIRD FORCE, ALTHOUGH SOME MINI-PARTIES HAVE DETERMINED
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TO STAY THE COURSE. THE QUESTION BEFORE THE ELECTORATE IS A SIMPLE ONE: SHALL JOAQUIN BALAGUER HAVE ANOTHER FOUR YEARS AS CHIEF OF STATE, OR HAVE THE COMINICAN PEOPLE DECIDED THAT IT IS NOW TIME FOR "CHANGE."

3. THE OFFICIAL TERMINATION OF THE LONG DRAWN-OUT BATTLE AT MIDNIGHT SUNDAY FRAMED THE CHOICE FOR THE VOTERS. PRESIDENT

BALAGUER, APPEARING AT 8PM LAST NIGHT FOR HIS LAST FORMAL CAMPAIGN SPEECH OVER A NATIONWIDE HOOKUP HIS PARTY HAS PRACTICALLY MONOPOLIZED IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, ENDED ON A NOTE HE HAS STRUCK SEVERAL TIMES DURING HIS ARDUOUS RUN FOR A FOURTH TERM: WHAT THE COUNTRY MUST DECIDE IS WHETHER IT WANTS HIM OR PRD SECRETARY GENERAL JOSE FRANCISCO PENA GOMEZ RUNNING THE NATION FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS. BALAGUER, CALLING INTO QUESTION THE INTELLECTUAL CAPACITIES OF PRD PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ANTONIO GUZMAN, SAID PENA WOULD BE THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE IN ANY PRD GOVERNMENT.

4. HIS REMARKS ONLY SUBTLY ECHOED THE BLATANT CHARGES VOICED BY OTHER REFORMISTA SPOKESMEN DURING THE DAY: THAT PENA IS "ANTI-NATIONALIST" (I.E., OF FEARED HAITIAN ORIGIN) WHOSE CHARACTER IS DANGEROUSLY FLAWED AND WHOSE POLITICAL CREDO IS DANGEROUS FOR ANYONE IN THIS COUNTRY WHO HAS ANYTHING TO PROTECT--FAMILY, FORTUNE AND EVEN PERSONAL SECURITY. IT WAS, IF ANYTHING, A NEGATIVE SPEECH.

5. THE REPLY FROM PENA, WHO BEGAN HIS LAST FORMAL SPEECH AT 11:10 PM, TOOK THE PRESIDENT'S CHARGES HEAD ON. HE REPEATED HIS PLEDGE TO STEP DOWN FROM HIS POSITION IN THE PARTY SHOULD THE PRD WIN (HE IS CANDIDATE FOR NO OFFICE), AND ADDED THAT HE WOULD LEAVE THE COUNTRY FOR A PERIOD. ALLUDING TO HIS ALLEGED HAITIAN ANTECEDENTS, HE SAID HE BOWS TO NO MAN IN HIS DEDICATION TO THE DOMINICAN

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PEOPLE AND THEIR NATION. PENA THEN SHIFTED TO THE OFFENSIVE AND BLASTED BALAGUER AS A THROW-BACK TO THE TRUJILLO DICTATORSHIP WHO RECKLESSLY PROMISES TO SPEND BILLIONS ON ILL-CONCEIVED PROJECTS IF ONLY HE IS REELECTED. HE CHARGED THE PRESIDENT WITH ACTIVELY INCITING THE WORST ELEMENTS IN DOMINICAN SOCIETY--SOME HE NAMED AND CITED SPECIFICS OF WHAT THEY HAD DONE--TO VIOLENCE THAT COULD BE USED AS A PRETEXT TO ANNUL AN ELECTION WHICH THE PRESIDENT HAS LOST. IT WAS A TOUGH SPEECH. FOLLOWING IN A MORE MODERATE AND REASSURING MANNER WAS THE CANDIDATE, GUZMAN, WHO FINISHED SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT.

6. THE CAMPAIGN ACTUALLY ENDED ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON WHEN THE PRD, AFTER BEING TOLD BY THE GOVERNMENT IT HAD TO CHANGE THE LOCALE OF ITS GRAND FINALE, ALLEGEDLY NOT TO BLOCK TRAFFIC, DECIDED TO CALL OFF THE SCHEDULED RALLY ALTOGETHER. THE PARTY HAD THE ELECTION WON, PENA ANNOUNCED, AND TO GO AHEAD WITH ITS PLANNED STREET DEMONSTRATION WOULD ONLY GIVE THE "BANDA COLORA," OR REFORMISTA TOUGHS, NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO CREATE INCIDENTS WHICH COULD SPIRAL DOWNWARD INTO "RIVERS OF BLOOD."

7. WHILE THE PRD CALMLY SAT BACK ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON TO WAIT, PREPARING ITSELF QUIETLY TO TURN OUT A VOTE THAT WOULD VAULT GUZMAN INTO THE PRESIDENCY, BALAGUER WENT TO THE NATION'S SECOND CITY AND HIS OLD STRONGHOLD, SANTIAGO, FOR THE MUCH TOUTED GRAND FINALE OF THE REFORMISTA PARTY. ITS ORGANIZERS HAD COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO ROUNDING UP 300,000-400,000 SUPPORTERS FOR A DEMONSTRATION THAT WOULD PROVE THERE WERE NO REFORMISTA SOFT SPOTS IN THE VOTE-RICH CIBAO VALLEY.

8. IT WAS AN IMPRESSIVE SHOW, EVEN AN EMOTIONAL ONE, WHEN THE PRESIDENT'S CARAVAN ARRIVED TO A TUMULTUOUS RECEPTION IN THE LARGE PLAZA IN FRONT OF SANTIAGO'S OLIMPIC STADIUM. SUNDAY'S ONLY TWO NEWSPAPERS IN THE REPUBLIC REPORTED IT WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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SMALLER THAN THE PRD RALLY AT THE SAME SITE ON APRIL 30, BUT THE EMBASSY HAS NO WAY OF MAKING A COMPARISON.

9. WHAT WAS ALSO IN EVIDENCE OVER THE WEEKEND IN SANTIAGO, HOWEVER, WAS SURPRISING PRD SUPPORT. EVEN THOUGH REFORMISTAS BY THE THOUSANDS WERE BUSSED IN TO THE STADIUM, CREATING HUGE TRAFFIC JAMS ALL OVER THE SMALL CITY--AND EVEN THOUGH THE ARMED FORCES IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE CITY WERE SHOWING THEIR COLORS (AS SOLDIERS WORE RED BANDANAS, ATTACHED PARTY FLAGS ON JEEPS, AND PASTED PICTURES OF BALAGUER TO THE STOCKS OF THEIR AUTOMATIC WEAPONS)-- THE PRD WAS NOT INTIMIDATED. PEOPLE WERE PACKED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE LENGTHY PARADE ROUTE, WAIVING WHITE PRD HANDKERCHIEFS AND GIVING THE PASSING REFORMISTAS, AND ESPECIALLY THE MILITARY'S FLYING SQUADRONS, THE LOCAL VERSION OF THE RASPBERRIES, A HIGH-PITCHED OOH-ING SOUND, WITH OCCASIONAL PRD SLOGANS THROWN IN. THERE WERE MOMENTS OF TENSION BUT NO INCIDENTS.

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10. THE FACT THAT THE PRD WHITE WOULD BE SHOWN AT ALL IN THAT CONSERVATIVE CITY, AND BY SUCH GREAT NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WHEN THE REFORMISTAS SEEMED TO SWARM THROUGH ITS STREETS, SEEMED EVEN TO SURPRISE SANTIAGUEROS. JUST AS SURPRISING WAS THE STRONG SHOWING OF PRD SUPPORT ALL ALONG THE 180 KILOMETER HIGHWAY FROM SANTIAGO TO SANTO DOMINGO LATE SATURDAY AFTERNOON. PEOPLE WERE BUNCHED AT FREQUENT INTERVALS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ROAD, WAVING FLAGS, PICTURES OF THE CANDIDATES, HANDKERCHIEFS, AND EVEN COLORES PAPER AND RAGS. THERE WAS A GOOD SHOWING OF RED, BUT ON BALANCE THERE WAS MORE WHITE.

11. BALAGUER HAD A WIND-UP RALLY IN FRONT OF PR HEADQUARTERS IN THE CAPITAL YESTERDAY MORNING, BUT IT APPEARED TO BE PRO FORMA. HIS SPEECH WAS AS SHORT AS THE ONE THE DAY BEFORE IN SANTIAGO AND ON THE SAME THEME--BLASTING AWAY AT MEDDLERS IN THE NATION'S ELECTORAL PROCESS. (THE PRD'S GUEST OBSERVERS FROM THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL AND OTHER "FOREIGN ORGANIZATIONS"--NOT THE OAS--WERE THE TARGETS.) BUT IT SEEMED TO BE AN OBLIGATORY APPEARANCE TO COMPLY WITH HIS RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE PARTY IN THE NATIONAL DISTRICT.

12. SANTO DOMINGO AND SANTIAGO, AND FROM ALL WE GATHER OTHER AREAS, WERE QUIET YESTERDAY AND TODAY. PEOPLE
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GATHERED IN THE MORE POPULOUS, POORER NEIGHBORHOODS TO SHOW THE FLAG PREDOMINENTLY, IT APPEARED, WHITE), BUT THERE WERE NO CLASHES; PERREDEISTA CROWDS COEXISTED WITH REFORMISTAS WITHOUT INCIDENT, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE HEARD OF SHOOTING AFFRAYS HERE AND IN SAN CRISTOBAL SOMETIME YESTERDAY AFTERNOON. WE WOULD GAUGE THE ATMOSPHERE AS CALM, EVEN FESTIVE; THE MALECON, SANTO DOMINGO'S MOST POPULAR OCEANSIDE STROLLING PLACE, HAD A CARNIVAL ATMOSPHERE YESTERDAY EVENING, AS CROWDS LINED THE STREET WAVING THEIR HANDKERCHIEF OR FLAG, WHILE HORN-TOOTING CARS DROVE UP AND DOWN THE AVENUE, THEIR OCCUPANTS HAPPILY SHOUTING SLOGANS AND WAVING THEIR COLORS. AN EMBASSY OFFICER IN SANTIAGO REPORTS THE SAME PHENOMENON THERE YESTERDAY. TRAFFIC IN BOTH CITIES TODAY IS LIGHT, THE DOMINICANS HAVING STOCKED UP ON GASOLINE AND FOODSTUFFS EARLIER, AND ALL OUR CONTACTS SEEM REASONABLY RELAXED.

13. COMMENT: TWO MONTHS AGO, IT WAS HARD TO IMEGINE THAT THINGS WOULD HAVE TURNED OUT SO PEACEABLY. POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN THE DOMINICAN MIND OF THAT TIME MEANT PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND STRIFE ON A NATIONAL SCALE, AND MOST PARTICULARLY IN THE CAPITAL, WHERE OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT IS SO STRONG AND MEMORIES OF 1965 ETCHED SO SHARPLY.

14. IT CAN STILL HAPPEN HERE ESPECIALLY IF TH RETURNS INDICATE AN OPPOSITION WIN OR NEAR-MISS. BUT THE PREVAILING ATTITUDE AMONG DOMINICANS SEEMS TO BE THAT THEY ARE GOING TO VOTE THEIR CHOICE ON TUESDAY, AND NO ONE CAN PREVENT THEM FROM DOING THAT. WHILE THERE IS AN EX-PECTANT EDGE TO THE POPULAR MOOD, WE WOULD JUDGE THE PRESENT ATMOSPHERE AS ONE REFLECTING CONFIDENCE.
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